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FACE FRONT
Amargo, with partner, in *Poeta*.

Broadway's *Movin' Out*, met Amargo at a gala performance in Mexico City two years ago. "I just thought, This guy has a quality like Prince or any of those great sexual beings," Thomas says. "I want some of that! He has every woman jumping after him." He laughs. "Also, his technique—his arms, his port de bras, his attack—and his musicality and style are incredible. He's just a cool cat with a lot of energy and a lot of love to share."

In *Poeta en Nueva York*, Amargo explores a fusion of styles. "Flamenco is the purest expression of Spanish art for me," he says. "My show is more crazy—when people go to the theater for Rafael Amargo, it's not only a bullfighter costume and 'Olé, olé, olé! No, no, no. Sometimes I dance with different music, another costume. That's my vision—my idea about flamenco is more open and

"Rafael Amargo has a quality like Prince... every woman jumps after him."

more contemporary. I am a rebel." He says that he has never been asked to participate in City Center's Annual Flamenco Festival, explaining his exclusion by sniffing the air: "My smell is not old."

Still, Amargo's strict flamenco training began when he was just nine in his hometown of Granada, Spain. "I danced when I was still inside of my mother," he said. "She remembers that when she played music, I was dancing. She said, 'I either have a big artist or a big monster!'" He is also a well-known film actor in Spain (this November, he will begin a new movie costarring Mónica Cruz, Penélope's sister) but, for the moment at least, he is basking in his unknown status. "I like to start at zero," he says. "It is similar to how I was 15 years ago, when I moved from Granada to Madrid. I like working and having ambition. If I don't work, my art dies." But there are other reasons he's currently in love with New York. "For me, it's also very good because I can go out on the street"—he grabs his crotch with one hand and picks his nose with the other—"and to be like this. In Spain, no! The paparazzi comes."

Poeta en Nueva York is at City Center Thursday 22 and Friday 23.

Poetic justice

Rafael Amargo hopes to become America's next idol. By **Gia Kourlas**

On a recent Saturday afternoon, flamenco star Rafael Amargo—a bit dazed from his morning flight from Spain, but still boyishly handsome—vigorously refused an offer of espresso. "No coffee!" he exclaimed. "Many emotions for me when I drink coffee." It was likely a wise decision; jet lag notwithstanding, Amargo is a ball of nervous energy.

At the moment, he has a couple of concerns: On Thursday 22, he makes his New York debut at City Center with his 2002 evening-length production *Poeta en Nueva York*. And while his name lends itself to boldface type in Spain, he was

counting on the box-office draw of his good friend Angel Corella, the American Ballet Theatre principal who was scheduled to perform in the show until ABT's director, Kevin McKenzie, put his foot down.

"Angel wants to stay with my show," Amargo says. "He is very down. June 22 and 23 are the free days of Angel; I wanted to perform at City Center on the 23rd and 24th, but I changed the schedule for Angel. I am very small compared to ABT. Why?"

Kelly Ryan, ABT's spokesperson, responded with this statement: "American Ballet Theatre's dancers are under contract to work exclusively with ABT. It has been the company's policy to be flexible on this exclusivity clause, if the dancers' schedule permits. Given Angel's heavy performance

schedule, both parties agreed an appearance with Raphael Amargo was not feasible at this time."

In any event, Corella's participation won't make or break the show, in which Amargo, 30, stars as poet Federico García Lorca. Inspired by Lorca's time at Columbia University from 1929 to 1930, *Poeta en Nueva York* features Amargo's 30-member company of dancers, musicians and singers. Amargo describes it as less a flamenco show than a musical (it also includes contemporary dance and extensive film footage of Spanish actors reading Lorca's poetry). And the cast will include one local star—Rasta Thomas—who performs "Pequeño Vals Vienés" ("Little Viennese Waltz").

Thomas, a former member of the Kirov Ballet who also starred in